

## 2024 LEARN HERE HEROES

### Battle Ground Public Schools



Leading with heart, **Karen Guenther** transforms lives one GED at a time. As the driving force behind Summit View High School's Open Doors program, she has expanded Battle Ground's program from 10 to 50 students, creating a supportive environment where each can thrive. Her focus on compassion and emotional support extends beyond the classroom, making her a constant source of encouragement for students to reach their potential. Karen's dedication to those facing challenges like homelessness and parenthood reflects her steadfast belief in their resilience. Through innovative outreach, such as creating infographics for district counselors, she raises awareness of the program's flexibility, ensuring more students can find a path to success. Her proudest moments come when she sees students cross the finish line, like last year's 14 graduates, with hopes for even more to be ready for their next steps this year. Karen, thank you for your tireless commitment to empowering students and for your inspiring ability to turn challenges into triumphs, making a lasting difference in their lives.



Bringing creativity to life on stage and in the classroom, **Vivian Zoller** is a cornerstone of the River HomeLink theater program. Since 2015, Vivian has been the guiding hand behind the vibrant sets that have transformed student productions. Her expertise goes far beyond set design—she trains students and parents alike in everything from color theory to prop construction, ensuring that each production runs smoothly. Now lending a helping hand to the Theater Tech Class, Vivian has expanded her role to offer hands-on learning, providing students with firsthand experience as part of the crew. With her family actively involved in the program, they have collectively brought the theater initiative to new heights. One of her fondest memories is participating in *Anne of Green Gables*, where she and her five children worked side by side to bring the production to life. Thank you, Vivian, for generously sharing your wealth of knowledge and infusing the stage with creativity, inspiring students to embrace their artistic talents.

## Camas School District



Turning pages and transforming literacy, **Jenn Scott and Brooke Hanson** are a dynamic duo driving significant change in education. Their collaborative efforts in educator training and professional learning workshops have led to a remarkable improvement in foundational skills assessment data, reshaping the literacy landscape. Jenn ensures that consistency is maintained among the teachers they instruct, guiding them on how to analyze the data collected on student progress. In their coaching sessions, they tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of their educators, ensuring that everyone is equipped to support student learning effectively. Meanwhile, Brooke enhances learning through real-time modeling in the classroom, making the experience both fun and engaging. Together, they create an environment where high-quality instruction thrives and a love for reading flourishes. Jenn's initiative with the Bookmobus, a summer mobile library, further enriches students' educational experiences by promoting access to diverse reading materials and fostering a community of readers. Thank you, Jenn and Brooke, for your invaluable contributions to student learning and for helping write a new chapter in education.



Building bridges and fostering dialogue, **Kevin Paskowski** has spent the last two years as co-chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), leading with commitment and care. His journey began while supporting his wife during her seven years as PTO fundraising chair, which ignited his passion for community engagement. Kevin officially joined the CAC when his eldest daughter was in 5th grade, bringing a unique perspective as a parent and advocate for educational excellence. His hands-on approach shines through as he collaborates with fellow committee members, addressing the diverse needs of students and families. Under his leadership, the committee tackled complex issues like researching the impact of a balanced school calendar to combat summer learning loss, providing students with valuable opportunities for academic growth. Whether analyzing policies or advocating for resources, Kevin always aims to make decisions that enhance the educational experience for every student. Kevin actively listens to parents, teachers, and students, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued, fostering an environment of inclusivity. Thank you, Kevin, for your resolute passion and leadership in enhancing our educational community.

## Clark College



From single mother to trailblazing educator, **Dr. Michele Cruse** embodies resilience and determination. As a first-generation college student, she advocates for education as a transformative force, believing it can uplift marginalized communities. Her work ethic shines through in her leadership, stabilizing enrollment and enhancing postsecondary access, particularly for historically underserved populations. Collaborating with organizations like Fourth Plain Forward, ESD 112, and others, she has driven initiatives that address disparities, including increased access to Running Start and additional support for low-income students. Her efforts have led to significant progress, such as the expansion of services through the Penguin Early College Center, removing barriers like food insecurity. Beyond her role at Clark College, Michele and her husband also run a non-profit organization that supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her steadfast zeal to youth, education, and community growth continues to inspire all who work with her. Thank you, Dr. Cruse, for empowering the next generation and paving the way for a more equitable future!



**Brittini Lasseigne** is leading the charge to connect and uplift Clark College's alumni community. As a former student who attended Clark with the Running Start program, Brittini knows firsthand the power of support and inclusivity that the college offers. Since joining the Clark College Foundation Alumni Board in 2018 and moving to the Board of Directors in 2023, she's been a champion of diversity, working to ensure that the foundation reflects the community it serves. From advocating for a multicultural graduation for BIPOC students to helping reengage alumni through unique events like mini-golf, axe throwing, and professional mentorship programs like "Check Out a Pro," Brittini's impact is far-reaching. Her dedication extends to promoting fundraising for scholarships, providing opportunities to students just as Clark did for her during a difficult time in her own life. Her compassion and leadership make her a true advocate for Clark College's mission to support, honor, and connect its community. We thank you, Brittini, for your remarkable devotion to building community, empowering students, and enriching the alumni experience at Clark College.

## Evergreen Public Schools



“‘It takes a village’ to uplift a future, and in every hand we extend, we shape only a child, but the world they will one day lead” is the mantra **Aaron Helenihi** lives by. As a Student Engagement Specialist, Aaron exemplifies heroism through his tireless commitment to supporting students and families throughout Evergreen Public Schools, particularly with cultural connectedness and expertise in the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. His journey from humble beginnings in Hawai’i to becoming a beacon of hope for these students is a testament to his resilience and commitment. He proactively engages with families, seeking out external resources and forging partnerships with community organizations, ensuring that they not only enroll but thrive in the school system. Aaron’s compassionate approach makes him a true torchbearer of equity and empowerment; he sees a need for genuine, empathetic representation and fights tirelessly to fill it. Whether reuniting a student with her family or leading the Pacific Islander Advisory Council, Aaron pours his heart into every action he takes. For his exceptional dedication to fostering inclusivity and building strong community ties, thank you, Aaron, for being a powerful advocate for our students and for inspiring us all to lift each other up.



If you’re looking for a leader who inspires solidarity and drives change, look no further than **Jason Huggins**. Over his six years on the Evergreen School District Foundation board, including three as president, Jason has been the guiding force behind the foundation’s growth and success. He coordinates bi-monthly meetings, secures business sponsorships, and leads all fundraising activities. Under his leadership, the foundation has raised nearly half a million dollars, expanding its reach to support students through initiatives like Stuff the Bus, Educational Excellence Grants, and Read Across America. Jason’s passion for education and helping disenfranchised students is deeply personal, rooted in his own experiences with food disparity. His selfless dedication and ability to unite the community around the cause of supporting education have made him an invaluable advocate for students, staff, and families. Thank you, Jason, for your ongoing commitment to ensuring students have the tools and resources necessary to succeed.

## Hockinson School District



Empowering Every Learner: **Elizabeth Fortier** embodies the essence of "student-centered" education. A Nationally Board Certified educator, she builds meaningful relationships with her students, recognizing and nurturing their strengths while fostering a belief in their potential. Beyond her role as a teacher, Elizabeth has worked with Project Lit to create a library of over a thousand books, representing diverse perspectives so students can both see themselves and learn about others. She has also inspired fellow educators at Hockinson High School to create their own classroom libraries, fostering a culture of reading. Her dedication extends to creating and leading alternative classrooms, like Bridges at Mt. View High School, where she bridges core subjects through service learning, showing struggling students how academics connect to the real world. A former literacy coach, she has championed academic literacy across curriculums. Most recently, she has collaborated with educators to establish an inclusive ninth-grade English classroom, incorporating diverse teaching methods to support all learners. Thank you, Elizabeth, for creating an environment where every student can thrive.



**Jennifer Foster** is a vibrant force of community spirit and dedication. As a committed volunteer for HSD schools, she and her husband consistently step up to support district events, leaving a lasting impact on students' lives. With two sons in the band, Jennifer has served on the People Working Together (PWT) board since 2019 and became the VP of Fundraising for the Hockinson HS Music Boosters in 2023. Motivated by her passion for building community connections, Jennifer orchestrated the Fun Run, raising an impressive \$40,000. Additionally, her leadership in running the silent auction and preparing raffle baskets helped generate over \$50,000—proceeds that directly enrich student programs. Grateful for the generosity of local businesses, she ensures their contributions are recognized, believing that collaboration is essential for success. Balancing a full-time job with her volunteer commitments, Jennifer inspires those around her, even motivating her husband to create a kindness bench near the middle school track. Thank you, Jennifer, for your unyielding dedication and for making a profound difference in the lives of our students and schools.

## La Center School District



Behind every great school community are dedicated individuals like **Elizabeth Marshall** —making magic happen behind the scenes! Throughout her years in the La Center School District, Beth has worn many hats and left a lasting impact in every role. Currently serving as the district data clerk, she oversees security access and generates critical reports, ensuring compliance with state regulations on everything from student discipline to health records. Beth’s support extends beyond her data duties, as the Senior Class Advisor, for the ninth year in a row, and volunteers with the drama program, helping with costumes and productions. She is always the first to lend a hand at school events, from taking tickets at dances to supervising students. Known as the district’s unofficial historian, Beth brings joy to the workplace by organizing the annual Holiday Breakfast, decorating the staff lounge, and creating engaging activities for her fellow staff. Her positive attitude and commitment foster a sense of community and belonging. Thank you, Elizabeth, for being the heart that keeps La Center’s spirit alive, year after year!



For a boost of school spirit and community support, **Amanda Aseph** is the one to thank. As a dynamic leader of the La Center Booster Club, Amanda’s impact has been nothing short of extraordinary. Her tireless efforts include managing social media to promote student achievements and raising an impressive \$22,000 for much-needed stadium improvements. But it’s Amanda’s personal touch that truly sets her apart. She organizes heartfelt send-offs for graduating seniors, provides scholarships to deserving students, and ensures that every individual feels celebrated during school events. Amanda has also volunteered countless hours taking photos of student-athletes, running a booth for patrons to buy Booster gear, and helping to organize the La Center Hall of Fame banquet. Balancing her state job with her passion for the school community, Amanda exemplifies the power of dedication and enthusiasm. Her commitment inspires others to contribute, creating a vibrant atmosphere that uplifts everyone. Thank you, Amanda, for your unflagging drive and the infectious spirit you bring to our school community.

## Ridgefield School District



In a world where every student needs a mentor, **Donna Allen** stands as a guiding light. As a dedicated middle school counselor, she leads groups that help students navigate their personal challenges, creating a space where they feel safe and supported. With her therapy dog, Harley, by her side, Donna offers both emotional support and companionship, showing firsthand the healing power of a loyal friend. She has transformed the conference room into a cozy, inviting environment where students can gather, share, and grow. Donna's infectious laughter echoes through the halls, lifting spirits and boosting morale for both students and staff. Whether offering a word of encouragement, a restorative conversation, or simply a moment of calm, Donna brings empathy and care to every interaction. Her untiring drive to creating a nurturing atmosphere makes her a cornerstone of the View Ridge community, and her work leaves an indelible mark on everyone she touches. Thank you, Donna, for being the heart of our school.



If you're hungry for change, look no further than **Bill Baumann**. Through the Ridgefield Green Bag Project, Bill has made a lasting impact in Ridgefield, tackling food insecurity one bag at a time. In 2018, motivated by the challenges facing our nation and a desire to make a positive impact, he began this journey by knocking on doors with his daughter to gather food donors. Bill's leadership has transformed a humble beginning of 290 pounds of food into a staggering 8,400 pounds this month, inspiring volunteers to join the cause. His modesty is as abundant as his dedication; he calls himself "the grease in the gears," yet his resourcefulness and determination have kept the community well-fed and united. Bill orchestrates all communication and schedules for donation drop-offs. Without his heart and relentless effort, addressing the basic need for food in Ridgefield would be far more challenging. Thank you, Bill, for your indomitable spirit to nourishing our community and being an inspiring force for good!

## Vancouver Public Schools



Building futures, one student at a time, **Eric Saueracker**, a powerhouse educator at Hudson's Bay High School for 18 years. Teaching since 2005, he has inspired students across various subjects, including Math, Science, and STEM/Engineering. In 2022, Eric launched the Construction Trades Program of Choice, creating pathways for students to explore carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and masonry. As an advisor for SkillsUSA, he guides students to compete at local and national levels, opening doors they might not have thought possible. Eric also leads the Knowledge Bowl, a trivia-based club that fosters intellectual curiosity among students in Southwest Washington. His commitment extends beyond the classroom; he volunteers at cross-country, track, and wrestling events, ensuring a well-rounded experience for his students. Motivated by a desire to provide opportunities for those who may be overlooked, Eric embodies the spirit of a dedicated educator and leader. Thank you, Eric, for pouring your heart into every lesson and nurturing the dreams of your students with compassion and dedication.



**Deanne Warren** is a remarkable volunteer whose unyielding dedication exemplifies the true power of community involvement. Even after her own children have graduated, she continues to invest countless hours in supporting elementary, middle, and high school students. Whether it's running concessions and hospitality for the booster club or mending band uniforms, Deanne's wide-ranging contributions have a profound impact on students and families alike. Her work doesn't stop there—she organizes book fairs, manages events, and actively supports Parent-Teacher Student Associations, always ensuring students feel seen, valued, and supported. From feeding students during long events to making sure they get on the bus for their graduation party, Deanne's focus is consistently on their well-being, success, and sense of belonging. Her selfless service, combined with her genuine care for students, has inspired everyone around her and helped create a more nurturing school environment. Vancouver Public Schools is fortunate to have someone like Deanne, whose contributions truly make a lasting difference in the community. Thank you, Deanne, for your tireless efforts and heartfelt commitment to supporting students and families!



## Washington State School For The Blind



**Pat Wilber** is a beacon of empowerment for students at Washington State School for the Blind, transforming their educational experiences into journeys of discovery and confidence. With a commitment to fostering independence, Pat tailors individualized programs that enhance literacy. She engages students in dynamic discussions, seamlessly integrating personal interests, like music and drama, into their learning. One instance of her promoting a love for the arts took place when she, alongside her colleagues, helped a student get involved in drama at their local home school. The following year, the student's passion for theater continued to grow as they refined their skills and even took part in a school play. Pat's enthusiasm extends to every aspect of her work, whether she's adapting reading materials or introducing innovative strategies for learning. Her unique ability to connect with each student not only cultivates their skills but also builds lasting confidence, playing a role in their growth and success. Through her passion, dedication, appreciation, and inspiration of her peers at WSSB, she continues to uplift students as they navigate their paths toward the future. Thank you, Pat, for your ongoing dedication to supporting students and helping them succeed.



Pedaling Passion into Action, supported by his North River Racing teammates, **Steve Rosvold**'s visionary call to Adrienne Fernandez, WSSB's Recreation Director, in 2005 launched the WSSB Tandem Cycling Program. For two decades, Steve, members of the Vancouver Bicycle Club, and other local biking enthusiasts, have devoted countless hours to ensuring one of the school's most beloved recreational programs is a success. Steve recruits tandem captains and carefully matches teams with an enduring focus on safety. His meticulous planning of routes, organization of seasonal tune-ups, and positive attitude have inspired students, instilling courage, determination, and joy in each ride. Under his guidance, the program has seen 229 rides and over 21,000 miles, teaching students' teamwork, communication, and the importance of an active lifestyle. Steve's dedication has not only enriched the students' recreational experience but has also created lasting memories and a sense of community within WSSB. The program's motto, "Ride Safe - Have Fun!" echoes in the hearts of all involved thanks to his impact on the program's enduring success. Thank you, Steve, for your incredible dedication and for making such a meaningful difference in our students' lives.

## Washington School For The Deaf



First Impressions, Lasting Impact: **Taylor Mendoza-Reopelle** a welcoming face and beacon of support. As an administrative assistant at the Washington School for the Deaf, Taylor is often the first person students and staff meet, always greeting them with warmth and enthusiasm. She also serves as the self-appointed photographer taking time to attend as many sporting events to capture the spirit of the community. Encapsulating memorable moments for students who eagerly look for themselves in her photos on the school website and social media accounts, to share with their families and friends, brings her immense joy. Her willingness to help, stay late, and tackle extra projects showcases her dedication. One of her proudest moments was witnessing a student from Burma, who was experiencing language deprivation, unable to communicate with the world around them, learn American Sign Language at WSD and share their voice at a Board of Trustees meeting. Thank you, Taylor, for being an invaluable part of the community and for your resolute devotion to helping every student find their voice and succeed.



When it comes to community, **Ashley Wilkins** leads with both hands—and her heart! Taking the helm of the Parent-Staff Organization (PSO) wasn't just a role Ashley accepted; it was a mission to show her sons and fellow parents that it does take a village. Starting with just a handful of members, Ashley has grown the PSO into a vibrant force for good in her son's school. Her passion stems from a deep desire to give back to a place that has embraced her boys, especially her youngest, who thrives with the support of special education resources. Ashley's leadership isn't just about fundraising or boosting staff morale—it's about creating a sense of belonging, fostering connections, and fighting for more inclusive programs for students with unique needs. Her enthusiasm and heart have sparked a revitalization that has made a lasting impact on her school community. Thank you, Ashley, for showing us that the power of community lies in the hands of those who give back with their whole heart.

## Washington State University Vancouver



**Elisha Hardekopf** believes that true belonging is found in our differences, not in our sameness. As the driving force behind the Building a Community of Equity (BaCE) program, Elisha, along with her dedicated team of facilitators and thought leaders has transformed the way staff, faculty, and students engage with concepts of equity, oppression, and community building. Her inviting and passionate approach has not only expanded accessibility and LGBTQ+ learning development but has also earned the BaCE program international recognition. Under her leadership, the BaCE program continues to make a measurable impact, with participants showing significant growth in intercultural competence. Elisha's dedication to holding space for individuality and diversity, combined with her powerful personal experiences, such as performing her thesis on women's hair in the workplace, underscores her commitment to making sure every voice is heard. For Elisha, "We all belong here, not because we are the same, but because we're not"—a belief that she carries out in every aspect of her work. Thank you, Elisha, for your dedication to fostering equity and celebrating diversity in our community.



Connecting Community and Campus: **Mei Wu** is a powerhouse advocate for WSU Vancouver. As a successful entrepreneur and alumna, Mei's passion for elevating WSUV is evident in everything she does. Whether she's promoting the campus at community events or engaging with local business leaders, she consistently intertwines community interests with educational opportunities. A key member of the Chancellor's Advisory Council, she offers her expertise to guide university initiatives, and as a mentor in the Business Growth Program, she empowers students to work with local enterprises, providing real-world experience that benefits both the students and the region. Mei's vision extends beyond the campus — her dedication to fostering a thriving Clark County stems from a desire to create opportunities that will entice future generations (including her own children) to return to the area. With her finger on the pulse of both community needs and university growth, Mei connects people, ideas, and resources to drive meaningful progress. Thank you, Mei, for being a guiding light and a dedicated community ally!

## Washougal School District



Empowering Every Learner: **Heidi and Nate Kellar** are dynamic educators whose dedication to students extends well beyond the classroom. As passionate Language Arts and History teachers at Jemtegaard Middle School, they lead instructional improvements through collaboration with their colleagues, always striving to enhance their teaching methods. But their commitment doesn't stop there—Nate and Heidi work tirelessly to support at-risk youth and families in their local community. They first started by organizing a kids club, where they provided snacks, connections, and even holiday parties for children in need. Since 2018, they have taken their efforts even further. Working with a dedicated team through Washougal Young Life. The Kellar's host a Young Life club at their home, where kids play games, enjoy meals, and engage in meaningful discussions focused on self-growth, all under the banner of "party with a purpose." Their summer camps continue this theme, offering kids a safe, supportive space to thrive and grow in their faith. Thank you, Heidi and Nate, for your exceptional dedication to nurturing the whole child, both inside and outside the classroom.



Packing hope into every bag: **Michelle Nurmi** is a tireless advocate for students at Cape Horn Skye Elementary and Canyon Creek Middle School. Through her volunteer work with the backpack meal program, she ensures that food-insecure students not only receive nutritious meals but also school supplies and even the opportunity for Christmas gifts. Michelle's commitment to her community shines in everything she does. Beyond the backpack program, she actively participates in nearly every school event, bringing her unwavering energy and support to the Boosters. A pivotal part of the middle school yearbook creation process, Michelle takes great care in gathering photos and details, making sure every student is represented and feels celebrated. Her attention to detail and passion for making others feel seen is evident in all her efforts. And through it all, she has never missed a single one of her son's baseball games. Thank you, Michelle, for being a steadfast source of support, joy, and positivity for our students and families.

*The Learn Here Project is a special project of Identity Clark County, a nonprofit business leaders group that strives to make Clark County an even better place to land, live, and learn for a lifetime. The Learn Here Project is made possible by Windermere Northwest Living, the Port of Vancouver USA, iQ Credit Union, and Identity Clark County.*

*More information is available at [www.discoverclark.org/learn](http://www.discoverclark.org/learn).*